

# Making the Healthy Choice the Easy Choice with "Fun Bites"

by: Maggie Hall

## YOUR INVOLVEMENT IS KEY

DOH-Pinellas' PICH staff can serve as a resource for communities wishing to adopt the "Fun Bites" initiative. They can offer "lessons learned" in approaching cities and sports leagues to gauge interest and share materials such as stickers and flyers to serve as sample collaterals. Concession stand operators may just to be assured that adding healthy items, and labeling them as such, can increase their sales while they still offer the usual snack items higher in calories, fat and sodium.

"We wanted to offer healthy items, but we didn't know if our sales would be affected. We were so pleasantly surprised that sales actually went up as families discovered that making the healthy choice was the easy choice at our concession stands."

- Joan Byrne



## SUMMARY

City events and youth sports can offer healthy food items for sale without losing revenue while building goodwill with families interested in selecting nutritionally sound snacks. The key was to continue to offer the other snacks that are usually sold at snack bars while enhancing the healthy options. Making it easy to pick out the healthy items by using an icon that connotes sunshine in Florida helped to brand the initiative as a home-grown innovation. Parents without much time to read labels can make quick menu choices and still eat healthy.

## CHALLENGE

After-school events and youth sports mean more physical activity for kids, but they can also lead to meal-time stress for parents who rely on concession stands for food purchases during their busy days. High-fat, high-sodium and nutritionally deficient foods sometimes make up the only choices at snack bars that are usually fundraisers for youth sports leagues. But what if parents could look at the menu offerings at concession stands and instantly know which choices are

the healthiest just by looking for an icon that signals freshness and nutrition? The Florida Department of Health in Pinellas County took on the challenge by creating "Fun Bites," a project that allows concession stands to label healthy choices with its orange-slice symbol to make ordering easy. Instead of checking nutritional information, parents can just look for the orange when they order.

## Contact

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## SOLUTION

DOH-Pinellas' "Fun Bites" came about as a result of consultations with nutritionists who suggested healthier items for concession stands. The items include baked chips, fruits such as bananas and raisins, bottled water and low-fat frozen treats. Items lower in fat, sodium and sugar were identified with stickers depicting an orange slice with bites taken out. Point-of-sale flyers explaining the "Fun Bites" initiative were created for display at concession stands where the menu boards use the orange brand. The City of Largo was the first to use "Fun Bites" in its city concession stand and the much larger City of St. Petersburg followed suit. "Fun Bites" are also now in use at youth leagues.

## SUSTAINABLE SUCCESS

DOH-Pinellas' PICH staff has presented "Fun Bites" statewide to healthy weight coordinators and public information officers to spread the word. At a recent state recreation conference, more than 800 attendees learned about the project and many expressed an interest in bringing it to their communities. The initiative is not copyrighted because the object is to have it replicated by other communities around the state and nation. As additional cities and youth sports leagues see the benefit of offering healthy concession items and labeling them as such, it will be easier to sustain the success of "Fun Bites" in Pinellas County and elsewhere.

## RESULTS

Although the City of Largo was hesitant to adopt "Fun Bites" because of concerns about lost revenue with healthier items for sale, Recreation, Parks & Arts Director Joan Byrne quickly discovered that sales more than doubled after families discovered that they could easily select the healthiest items just by looking for the orange icon. The city took the initiative to its other concession stands and added a stipulation to its vendor policy that any who sell at city-sponsored events must also offer items that could be labeled "Fun Bites." St. Petersburg and Palm Harbor Little League in the northern end of Pinellas County just adopted "Fun Bites" for its youth concession stand after seeing the positive results achieved in Largo.